



# Yellowstone River

## PARTNERSHIPS FOR STEWARDSHIP AND ECOSYSTEM PROTECTION

### Watershed Highlights

- Controversial wetlands and NEPA issues after the 1997 floods.
- Governor's Task Force directed to develop locally-based natural resource management options for the river.
- Grassroots effort helped initiate cumulative effects study by the Corps of Engineers; EPA participating with funding and technical support.
- Yellowstone River is becoming prototype for determining cumulative effects to the environment of large western river systems.

**Setting** - The 676-mile long Yellowstone River is the longest free-flowing river in the United States. It flows from its headwaters in the Absaroka Mountains in Yellowstone National Park across much of Southern Montana to its confluence with the Missouri River in Eastern North Dakota. The river's natural flow and dynamics are crucial to sustaining the western culture throughout its basin and are the life-



Yellowstone Falls  
Yellowstone National Park



Upper Yellowstone River and Floodplain

blood of natural ecosystems that have evolved along the river corridor.

In recent years, watershed partnerships from across the Yellowstone River Basin have formed to figure out how the river can continue to meet the needs of society and still exist as a wild, free-flowing river with self-sustaining ecosystems intact.

### Governor's Upper Yellowstone River Task Force -

The Task Force was established by Governor Marc

Racicot in 1997. The Governor charged the task force

to act as a forum for discussing issues that affect the Upper Yellowstone Basin, about 100 miles of the river's upper section. The Task Force seeks to ensure that future activities affecting the Upper Yellowstone are planned and conducted in a manner that will preserve the river's integrity, beauty, values, and function. The Task Force has sponsored a large cumulative effects study of the upper 100 miles of the river in cooperation with many Federal and State of Montana agencies. EPA has awarded grant money to support an ongoing river geomorphology study and study coordination services.

## Yellowstone River Conservation

**District Council** - Council membership consists of representatives from all 11 conservation districts adjacent to the Yellowstone River. The Council provides local leadership, assistance, and guidance for the management and conservation of the river's natural resources. The Council receives recommendations from its Resource Advisory Committee, made up of many diverse interest groups. Many State of Montana and Federal Agencies, including EPA, provide technical and financial support to the Council. A primary task of the Council is to partner with the Corps of Engineers to complete a com-



Yellowstone River

prehensive study of cumulative impacts to the Yellowstone River. In addition, the Council has established a unique relationship with a coalition of environmental groups called the Yellowstone River Conservation Forum. The Council and Forum have teamed up to develop a plan to identify and solve the most pressing environmental issues facing the Yellowstone River corridor.



"Eventually all things merge into one and a river runs through it"

Norman Maclean

### EPA's Role

EPA provided grants through a competitive process to the Council and Forum to help form the community Resource Advisory Council. The Upper Yellowstone River Task Force has also received money from the Montana Department of Environmental Quality from EPA's Clean Water Act Section 319 funding mechanism for cleaning up non-point source pollution, along with funding from the Office of Research and Development and NEPA. The 3 organizations are using the money to hire coordinators for communications and project management.

As resources allow, EPA is participating as a supporting member for these groups to provide insight and guidance to design and complete their study efforts.

For more information about EPA's activities in the Yellowstone River Basin, call Peter Ismert at 303-312-6215 or email [ismert.peter@epa.gov](mailto:ismert.peter@epa.gov)